

# BELPRES CHURCH

## **Sermon Title: Overwhelming Evil with Good**

**Annie Duncan**

*Disclaimer: This transcript was computer generated and may contain errors.*

---

### **Scripture:**

---

#### **Romans 12:14-21**

<sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. <sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. <sup>16</sup> Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. <sup>[a]</sup> Do not be conceited.

<sup>17</sup> Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. <sup>18</sup> If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. <sup>19</sup> Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," <sup>[b]</sup> says the Lord. <sup>20</sup> On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;  
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.  
In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." <sup>[c]</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

---

**Transcript:**

---

Well, good morning, BelPres.

Good morning.

Good morning. Good morning to all of you here as well as if you're worshipping online. My name's Annie Duncan, I'm the executive pastor here and it is always great to be with you in worship. I don't know if Jake knew this as he put together the set, but that song is the perfect segue into unpacking the scripture for today because there is no way that we can do what this scripture says if we don't surrender, if we don't pray to God, "Lord, have your way" because our way is different than God's way. How many of you know that this morning? Okay, then you're with me. So we're going to unpack this scripture.

So Romans 12 verses 14 through 21, "Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath. For it is written, 'It is mine to revenge. I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on their head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

So we are in week two of a sermon series called What Could Be, looking at the world around us and how in everything, everywhere it seems like we are divided in our country, in our schools, in our workplaces. And even here in this church, there are ways that we are divided. We think differently. And you see cancel culture cutting people out of their lives because of big offenses and sometimes really, really small offenses, right? But this sermon series, What Could Be, is asking the question, what could be though if us as Jesus followers, if we were to live a different way? And doesn't scripture say anything about that? Yes it does. Yes it does. In verse 21 of the scripture that we just read, it says, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

God made this perfect, perfect and lovely world. Everything that distorts it, that defaces, it is sin. It's evil. It's evil, the kind of division that exists in our world today is evil. Evil as in sinful. Anything that separates us from how God intended it to be. Does God intend for us to treat those that vote differently than us as enemies? Nope. Does God intend us to hold grudges against someone like from five years ago? Nope. God doesn't intend that. Does God intend for families to still be divided in the aftermath of COVID? Nope. God doesn't intend that. All of that evil division is what sin causes, and God has something to say about that. He has healing and hope for us in the midst of that.

So what has God done bad about it? And what are we to do about this? The book of Romans gives us the answer to both those questions. What has God done and what are we

to do? The entire book of Romans... Hang with me a little bit, I'm going to get a little bit nerdy. Colin's going to love it. The entire book of Romans is filled with gospel, indicatives and gospel imperatives. Gospel imperatives are what we must do, and they always grow out of the gospel indicatives, what God has done. The first 11 chapters of Romans are all about what God has done. I encourage you to read about them. Those are all of the gospel indicatives. And to summarize those first 11 chapters, we can look at Romans 5:8 where it says, "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." While we were still overcome with evil and sin out of God's goodness, God sent Jesus.

Chapters 12 through 16 then, they grow out of what God has done for us and describe what we must do, what's indicative that we must do. Those are those gospel imperatives. And that's why in chapter 12 in the very first verse, that's why it says, Paul writes, "Therefore in light of everything that I've just described about what God has done in chapters 1 through 11, therefore this is how we are to respond." In other words, what God has done is fuel for how we must act and how we must respond.

When Dr. Tony Evans walks through chapter 12, he talks about gives, and I'm going to unpack three of the gifts he talks about more, but there's three gives here in chapter 12. And the first give is that we give to God. We give to God. In Romans 12:1 it says, "Therefore, therefore I urge you brothers and sisters in view of God's mercy to offer or to give your bodies as a living sacrifice." So we give to God. That's the first one. Second one, we give to others. For each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function. So in Christ we, though many form one body, each member belongs to all the others, or each member gives to the others. So we give to God and we give to each other in Christian community. And third, we give to our enemies, and this is what we're going to unpack today.

"Bless those that persecute you. Live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge. If your enemy is hungry, feed them." The order of these gives is super, super important because if we cannot give ourselves to God and worship, then it's going to be really hard for us to give ourselves to each other in Christian community. And if we can't give ourselves to God and worship and if we can't give ourselves to each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, then how the heck are we going to give to those that mistreat us, our enemies, right?

And again, Dr. Tony Evans said, "If we don't give to those that mistreat us, if we don't give to our enemies, then we are just cul-de-sac Christians that give to God and give to each other." And if you don't know what a cul-de-sac is, google it, but it's a circle of houses. And basically his point there is saying, "We get stuck in a circle and we go nowhere if we're cul-de-sac Christians, but we are called to be conduit Christians, vessels that give to God our worship and give to each other in Christian community and give to the world that is so desperate and in need for the hope of Jesus." And the only way that we can do this is by properly relating to God and proper relating to our Christian brothers and sisters. Then we

can even give to those that don't agree with us, that mistreat us, that we would consider our enemies.

This isn't some formula to follow. It's not a three step plan. This is discipleship. This is what it means to follow Jesus. This isn't optional. And if we aren't giving our worship to God and truly following Jesus as as Jesus' followers, as disciples, then it's going to be really hard to not be divided. If we're following and worshiping something more than we are Jesus, it's going to be really hard to not be divided. If we're following our political channels more than we're following Jesus, then of course we're going to continue to be divided. But Jesus didn't say, "Follow your news source or follow your Instagram and then follow me." He said, "No, follow me."

So let's turn back to scripture. "Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good." Now, before we unpack this a little bit more, I want to pause for a moment. The text that we're walking through, it does not mean that if you are in an abusive relationship, that you should stay. It does not mean that if you are being criminally taken advantage of, that you should put up with it. Chapter 13 in Romans actually gets to this a little bit more, but I just want to make sure that we name that as we walk through this. And if that's you and if you are being abused of any kind, talk to somebody, talk to our care team, talk to somebody in your all in group. Get the help that you receive because abuse of any kind is never okay, right? Right? Okay, I just want to make sure that we all hear that before, before we walk through this a little bit more.

So how do we overcome evil with good? First, don't avoid those that offend you. We can all think of people that maybe are difficult in our lives, right? They've done harm to us, they annoy us, they bother us, they say insensitive things. It's way easier to avoid them, right? We just don't hang out with them or we ignore them. Do you have a friend that's causing you a lot of drama? Great, ghost them. Unfriend them on social media and just don't hang out anymore. Or does somebody in your small group say insensitive things? Join a different small group, right? Does somebody at school or work just not respect your faith? Great. Don't eat lunch with them. You can just avoid them. Or maybe there's somebody that's culturally different than you and that makes it difficult for you to understand them or just relate to them, so you just surround yourself with people that look like you and think like you. That's another kind of avoidance.

Jesus does not call us to avoid people. If you Google ways to be happy, one of the very first articles that comes up says to seek positive relationships with hopeful and optimistic people. And if you're struggling with your current relationships, seek out new ones. What? But Paul doesn't point us to Google. Thank the Lord he doesn't, right? Paul points us to Jesus. And Jesus says, "Now in light of all that God has done for you, don't cut people out of your life but pursue relationships with one another, even the people that harm you."

In verses 14 at 16, it says, "Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse. Live in harmony with one another." And the word persecute, it means to oppress, to harass, to

mistreat. The people that Paul was writing to, the Christians in Rome, they would've known this kind of persecution. This was written at a time when persecution against Christians was just picking up. A lot of ancient sources tell us that Paul was even beheaded and many Christians were killed and fed to the lions because of all of this persecution.

And the little cuts, there might be little cuts that we edit out of our lives like the annoying woman that talks about her dog way too much. That's me. You might cut me out of your life because it's like, "I don't want to hear about your dog anymore," right? And then there might be bigger cuts that we make in our lives, the inappropriate family member that you would just rather not invite to Thanksgiving dinner. Why are we called though to not avoid people? Why? Why? is this such a critical point? Why are we called to live in such a way? If we are to love as Jesus loves, then that's not limited to just the people that we like, that's not limited to the people that we see in church. That is for everyone, and that includes difficult people.

I pointed this segue out in the nine o'clock service, but I'm talking about difficult people. And now I'm about to talk about a story about my husband. Please don't read too much into that, so here's my segue now. Early on in our marriage, my husband and I, when we would argue, I would give him the silent treatment. I would simply not say anything to him. I would ignore his presence, he'd upset me, and that was my way of dealing with it. And if you think about it, this is really the ultimate punishment, denying someone your presence. It's saying to them, "You're not worth pursuing at all." And while we still argue, I have figured out better ways to work through my anger because the silent treatment is literal hell, it's literal hell. The only one in the universe that has the right to say "Depart from me" is God on judgment day. So when we cut people out of our lives and when we give them the silent treatment, we are playing God and we're playing judge. When we cut people out of our lives like that, it's saying to them, "You are not worth pursuing in relationship." But Jesus says, "Yes, they are. Yes they are." Paul's point in this passage is that we don't avoid difficult relationships. And in verse 18, it says, "If it's possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." And I got to be honest, for 42 years when I've read that verse, I've read it as kind of a verse that I can disregard. I've read the if it's possible part as optional. But how many know that there's no optional verses in the Bible? This isn't an optional verse. This is an accountability verse.

Have you actually done everything in your power to bring peace? Have you gone as far as you can go to live at peace with people? Have you truly pursued that relationship to the point where you can say, "There's nothing more that I can do. I've done all that I can do"? Too often we quit on people too early. We cut them out or we're just indifferent to them and don't care. But this first step that we're given to overcome evil with good is that we do not avoid those that offend us.

And the second step is a great pair to it, forgive. Forgive and don't seek revenge. Not only are we told not to avoid our enemies or those that have done us harm, but we're now called

to forgive them even before they ask for forgiveness. In verses 17 and 19, it says, "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath. For it is written, it is mine to avenge." To forgive means that we can give it over to God. We can give it to God rather than hanging onto it ourselves. Because if we don't let go and forgive, then we do. We want to seek revenge. The N.T. Wright says that revenge keeps evil in circulation. It just keeps going and going right?

Forgiveness isn't pretending it didn't happen. Forgiveness doesn't mean that what hurt didn't hurt, but it's saying, "In spite of how you're treating me, I'm not going to do the same to you. This ends here. I'm going to forgive you. I'm going to release you from my head space living up here rent-free where I'm coming up with all the ways that I can seek revenge. I'm not going to live that way. I'm going to choose to forgive." And how do you know when you've forgiven somebody? When you can bless them, when you can wish them well. You can truly wish them well. You're no longer relating to that person based on the thing that they did to you, but you're relating to them as another creation of Jesus that's also in need of forgiveness. We're commanded to forgive. We're commanded to do this because the fruit of unforgiveness is bitterness, it's toxic, it snowballs, and it festers and it grows. The thing that somebody did to you five years ago, that shouldn't be dictating how you live today.

At the end of March, I traveled to Greece with some friends here from BelPres, and we visited a few of our partners there that are working with refugees that are coming over from Syria, Afghanistan, Iran. And one person, Pastor Monachier, he's a pastor of an Iranian church there. And here's a pastor of me and Monachier. He grew up as a devout Muslim. And so when an Iranian Christian gave him a Bible that was translated into Farsi, he was very offended. Monachier was very offended at this person giving him a Bible. But rather than toss it aside, he devoured it because he was wanting just to confirm that the Quran contained God's accurate revelation.

And Pastor Monachier, he said, "When I got to Matthew 5:44 and read where Jesus said to love your enemies, it stopped me in my tracks. Monachier said, "Something inside me said, 'I must learn about this Jesus, because all I'd ever known from the Quran was to hate my enemies'." So Pastor Monachier kept on reading. When he read about the Jesus on the cross, asking God to forgive those that was killing him, Monachier knew in his heart that Jesus was indeed the Son of God. Forgiveness was the key for Monachier to be curious about Jesus and to eventually call him the Son of God and then become a pastor, pastoring people.

Being in ministry now for almost 20 years, I've heard so many stories about the power of forgiveness and how it points people to a relationship with Jesus, how they were living a life before and then they encountered this gift of forgiveness. And in inquiring about it, it pointed them to Jesus and then got them on a pathway where they were like Monachier saying, "This is the son of God. I want to give my life to this person. I want to give my life to this God."

Now, sometimes forgiveness can come easy and sometimes forgiveness takes a very long time, but it is a gift. It is a gift that we all have received from Jesus and are also commanded to give to those around us. And when we do that, we receive a gift then of freedom and healing. So we overcome evil with good not by cutting people out of our lives and not by seeking revenge, but by forgiving those that have offended us.

And finally, we repay evil with good. In verse 20, it says, "If your enemy is hungry, feed them. If they're thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you'll heap burning coals on their head." And that last phrase, if anyone heaps burning coals on others' heads, can you let me know? Because this is a weird section of scripture. Commentators have a variety of ways that they unpack it. But a common theme is that it basically is saying to do to somebody what they wouldn't expect. It's kind of like the ancient way of what we would now say blowing someone's mind, right? Putting coals on their head, yeah. Again, if you know anything more about that passage, come and find me afterwards because I'd love to know.

But the expected option, the expected option, the option that comes quite naturally would be to repay evil with evil, right? Push me and I'm going to push you back. But we can't overcome evil with evil because that makes us evil and sinful too. Cutting someone off, seeking revenge and repaying evil with evil, the last time I checked, these things do not point people to Jesus. But when we bless those that persecute us, when we forgive someone that doesn't deserve it, when we repay evil with good and grace, that's a way that can point someone to seeing who Jesus is. And that's the grace that changes people's hearts. It's by grace that we all have been saved and we can point people to that same grace so that they can receive it too. Repaying evil with good is something that we see Jesus do over and over again and he talks about it all the time in the stories that he told. Giving people not what they deserve, but pointing them to just how big and wide and deep God's love is.

With the woman that's caught in sin and she's about to be stoned, Jesus interrupts that situation and says to all those gathered there, "Whoever is without sin, go ahead and throw the first stone." And one by one they all walk away. And then the story that Jesus tells about the good Samaritan, there's prestigious people and religious leaders that are passing up this man on the highway that's been badly beaten and he needs help, but it's the man's enemy that's the one that stops and helps and gets the man the help that they needed. Unexpected. Unexpected, right? Jesus is clear of the ways that we're to treat people. And not just people that we like, but all people.

So here is your action step, BelPres for the week. Pick one of these to do. Has there been somebody that you've avoided? Pursue them. Is there somebody that you need to forgive? Start that process. Or as you go about your week, how can you respond with goodness in a way that others wouldn't expect? BelPres, this is not easy. It's not easy. It's contrary to how maybe we would respond naturally. But Jesus doesn't want us to respond naturally. He wants us to respond supernaturally. That's why Paul kicks off this entire section in verse 12

with that word therefore. So if this is a hard text for you to process and unpack, remember the therefore that comes before because in Romans 12:1 it says, "Therefore, in light of all that God has done for us, in light of all the ways that Jesus has forgiven us, we can do the same things because we are connected to the one that has done it already for us."

Forgiving those that haven't asked for it, repaying evil with grace and good, we can respond supernaturally. When we get tired and when we have no energy left, remember that we are connected to the one that never grows tired, that never runs out of energy, that never gives up. BelPres, we can overcome evil with good because Jesus already has. Amen?

Amen.

Amen. So God, we thank you for your promise. We thank you for your word. And Jesus, we thank you for the ways that you call us to live a life that's connected to you. God, the things that you ask us to do, we cannot do these apart from you. And that's good news. So Jesus, as we go from here, nudge us, convict us, challenge us, fill us with your spirit so that we go equipped and ready to follow you in everything that we do. It's in your name that we pray. Amen.



---

**Discussion Questions:**

---

*Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.*

**Introductions:** Spend a few minutes as a group introducing yourselves and welcoming new members to the group.

**Icebreaker Question:** What is your favorite spring time flower?

**Opening Question:** Looking back to last's week's sermon and scripture...How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

**For Further Study:** read Romans 12 (full chapter) this week.

**Scripture Reflection Questions:** Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

**Sermon Reflection Questions:** Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- How can we bless those who persecute us and not curse them? What does this look like in practice?
- In Annie's sermon, she talked about the importance of not avoiding people or cutting them out of your lives just because they are difficult. Why is this important for us as Christians? Who is someone that you've avoided or intentionally cut out of your life (don't name names!), and what would it look like to engage them like Romans 12 talks about?
- The fruits of unforgiveness are bitterness and anger. The fruits of forgiveness are freedom and reconciliation. How have you seen the fruits of forgiveness in your life or the life of your community?

**Closing Question and Application:** Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

**Closing Group Prayer:** Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.